



REALITY CHECK

*Engaging with
Practitioners*

Key success factors in the implementation of non-financial obligation on **SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES INTEGRATION** **IN HORIZON EUROPE**

Summary conclusions

Reality Check Event
27 November 2025
European Commission, Brussels

CONTEXT

On 27 November 2025, unit D3 “Health and Societal Transitions” of the European Commission’s DG RTD organized the Reality Check “Key success factors in the implementation of non-financial obligation on Social Science and Humanities Integration in Horizon Europe”.

The event was in-person and by invitation only. It gathered project coordinators and beneficiaries of Horizon Europe funded projects, National Contact Points, Programme Committee Members, evaluators of projects, and various stakeholders to discuss how to simplify and improve Social Sciences and Humanities Integration (SSH integration).

The Reality Check was organized in three parts:

FIRST PART

In the first part, the Commission presented the first Monitoring report on SSH-flagged projects funded under Pillar II of Horizon Europe ([1]). The report underlined the magnitude of SSH in Horizon Europe.

Between 2021-2023, around 40% of topics in Horizon Europe's thematic programmes (Clusters) were SSH-flagged, accounting for 41% of the total Pillar II budget (€7.2 billion), a clear increase compared to Horizon 2020.

Most projects funded in SSH-flagged topics (nearly 90%) involve at least one SSH partner, and over 40% are coordinated by SSH institutions, demonstrating that SSH plays a central role.

Key figures

SSH in Horizon Europe (2021-2023)



Topics

40%



Budget

€7.2B



Projects with SSH
partners

90%

([1]) weblink: [Integration of social sciences and humanities in Horizon Europe - Publications Office of the EU](#)

SECOND PART

During the second part of the Reality Check, 17 projects coordinators or beneficiaries presented the advantages and barriers in integrating SSH into their projects. In these projects, SSH disciplines such as arts, behavioural sciences, psychology, anthropology, history, sociology and economics cooperate with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines such as medical sciences, environmental sciences and artificial intelligence designers.

These projects showcased the following success factors:

1. **Matching**: Knowing partners beforehand, for instance through previous consortia
2. Starting **cooperation** at an early stage of **proposal drafting**
3. Developing and using a **unified vocabulary**
4. Defining and agreeing on a **shared project goal** and giving it priority over discipline- specific goals
5. **Understanding** each involved discipline's methodology
6. **Collaborating** on intermediate tasks, goals, modules and the overall goal together and sharing ownership of all parts of a project
7. Having coordinators with **double expertise** on SSH and STEM

They also identified several barriers for SSH integration:

1. Difference in **terminology/language** between the disciplines.
2. **Methodological differences** (e.g. qualitative vs. quantitative research as a barrier between STEM and SSH researchers)
3. **Epistemological differences** (e.g. different understanding of knowledge and concepts)
4. Different understanding of **success criteria** (e.g. differences in expected outcomes of a project)
5. Barriers in **establishing mixed networks** (e.g. lack of effective, existing networks between STEM and SSH scientists)
6. Inclusion of SSH tasks and/or SSH experts at a **late stage** of proposal preparation
7. SSH scientists often not involved in **core research** but being assigned tasks related to validation of research, communication, or other “administrative” tasks

THIRD PART

The third part of the Reality Check was organized into roundtables discussing four subjects: drafting of topics, application of topics, evaluation of proposals, and implementation of projects.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ensure more attention to SSH integration at topic drafting stage:** Topics could become more outcome-oriented and the expected contribution of SSH to project outcomes should be more clearly described from the outset.
- **Re-evaluate the use of ‘SSH-flagging’:** Simplifying SSH integration requirements may require revisiting the current flagging approach during topic drafting.
- Replace the voluntary ‘self-declaration’ box on the application form with **ORCID identifiers**: this change would enable verification of researchers’ disciplinary backgrounds and comprehensive professional profiles, provided it aligns with the overall IT systems framework.
- Enhance **evaluators’ SSH expertise** and facilitate the identification of their expertise by the relevant search tools and database.
- Shift from formal compliance (“box-ticking” in project proposals) towards more **qualitative collaboration** between STEM and SSH researchers. This should significantly enhance the quality of project results, as well as their relevance, value, suitability for market uptake (contributing to the innovation to investment journey) and enhance feedback to policy. This could, for example, be achieved by SSH researchers having a real leadership role in at least one work package. Here, project coordinators could benefit from more guidance and support.
- When **monitoring** the compliance with the non-financial obligation, the focus should shift **from quantitative to qualitative monitoring**: instead of counting SSH-flagged projects and SSH-type deliverables, the quality and impact of SSH integration should be evaluated, emphasising its contribution to the project results and their valorisation.
- Paying more attention to **humanities**, which in general receive less funding than the social sciences, and are more difficult to be integrated into other disciplines.

CONCLUSION

The Reality Check provided elements for the way ahead of successful and impactful SSH integration. It highlighted the importance of SSH integration for both SSH researchers and STEM researchers.

The European Commission will continue supporting SSH integration in the EU's Horizon Europe funding programs by promoting interdisciplinarity and by increasing awareness about opportunities for bridging different STEM and SSH disciplines. In the past few months, the Commission presented opportunities for improving the effectiveness of SSH integration at the Info Days and trainings of National Contact Points for the upcoming calls of Work Programme 2026. These activities will continue for the calls of WP2027.

We wish to thank everyone who attended the event, and specifically the representatives of the following projects who provided useful information at the Reality Check.

ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTING 17 HORIZON EUROPE PROJECTS

1. **SWIFT** - Universidad Central de Cataluña, Spain
2. **PLUS CHANGE** - CzechGlobe, Czechia
3. **ePROBES** - University of Córdoba, Spain
4. **ASP** - Masaryk University, Czechia
5. **VALUE4FARM** - Reading University, UK
6. **4P-CAN** - University of Bucharest, Romania
7. **BoSS** - University of Lisbon, Portugal
8. **CircleUp** - Riga Technical University, Latvia
9. **iCOSHELLs** - RISE Research Institutes of Sweden (RISE), Sweden
10. **LEGATO, STREXIT2 and DE-ESCALATE** - EORTC, Belgium
11. **TRANS Lighthouses** - University of Coimbra, Portugal
12. **MUSAE** - Politecnico di Milano, Italy
13. **RETOUCH NEXUS** - Technical University of Munich, Germany
14. **A-TRACK** - Vito remote sensing, Belgium
15. **WIMBY** - University of Utrecht, The Netherlands
16. **COMMUNITAS** - Innovation-Client Solutions R&D, Portugal
17. **SURE 5.0** - Aerospace Valley, France